

REPORTS TO NMC

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YZERFONTEIN

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In the development and enlarging of the new harbour at Yzerfontein (also known as Ysterfontein), local quartz porphyry bedrock and overlying partly consolidated sands were cut back, exposing artefacts, marine shell, ostrich eggshell and bone. These had been visible on a smaller scale before and noted by researchers from both the South African Museum and the University of Cape Town as part of surveys of west coast archaeological and palaeontological site distributions. The character of the stone tools encouraged the view that the site was a Middle Stone Age shell midden, one of several known along the Cape west coast. In February 1998 a permit (no. 80/98/01/004/51) was issued by the National Monuments Council to John Parkington to investigate the site more closely. This is a report on work to date (April 1999).

Inspection of the exposed section along the road leading to the harbour reveals that there are two occurrences of artefacts eroding out of the quarried quaternary sands that lie on top of local quartz porphyry bedrock, one immediately east of the entrance boom the other behind the ablation facility block. Only the former has so far been investigated. This site, which we refer to as YZFEN 1, is an extremely interesting occurrence, which requires rigorous dating of the undoubtedly associated bones, ostrich eggshell, marine shells and Middle Stone Age stone artefacts. The stratigraphy is locally complex, but generally quite clear. The surface of the hill quarried back to extend the harbour entrance is a calcrete carapace some 1.5 metres thick where exposed. Underneath this protective shell are some loose or partly consolidated sands that contain the artefacts and associated foodwaste. These in turn are stratified above partly calcreted sands that sit on a shelf of quartz porphyry. The surface of the bedrock is uneven and includes pillars of weathered material that in some parts are directly capped by the uppermost calcrete carapace. Between the pillars and under the carapace are pockets of loose material that probably accumulated as the fills of small cavities, which have now been partly or largely destroyed by the cutting back of this face. The fills that remain are probably the rear parts of cavities because they include fragments of aeolianite and calcrete cemented together with shells and artefacts, all of which have presumably slumped back by gravity.

A careful search of the surface of the hillside above the face reveals no Later Stone Age material. In fact the only archaeological material, in the form of marine shell, ostrich eggshell fragments and stone, above the calcrete is a pair of small banks of sediment which have probably been heaped up from the MSA assemblages below

earthmoving activities associated with the cutting back of the face. These two small heaps, which we have mapped, show no characteristics that might be definitively identified as LSA but are similar to the assemblages eroding from the in situ levels below. Although this needs further investigation we assume at the moment that all material from this occurrence is MSA and originates from one or more in situ lenses of midden in the fills under the carapace.

Material is tumbling from the stratified archaeological horizons and forming a loose talus on top of the shelf of quartz porphyry before falling over the lip and accumulating in a second lower talus at the foot of the quarried bedrock. This is shown in the accompanying figure. In February 1998 we excavated at the foot of the face in a wedge of deposit that had accumulated since the cutting back of the face. This material is obviously not in situ but provides us with a first opportunity to understand the character of the stone tool and associated shell and bone assemblage. In April 1999 we made a small collection of shell and stone from the upper talus where these remains are lying before tumbling further down to the level of the road. It is our intention to excavate the in situ archaeological levels but only when some scaffolding can be built to make work on the very narrow shelf of bedrock more safe. Some preliminary observations on the composition of these assemblages can be made.

The stone tools include a few definitively MSA pieces in the form of radial cores, nothing that is definitively LSA and many pieces that are not particularly diagnostic. The raw material is predominantly silcrete but there are a few quartz artefacts and some small number made from other rock types including calcrete and quartz porphyry. Most flakes are rather larger than we would expect in an LSA assemblage and some platforms are faceted as in MSA ones. There are a few retouched pieces, all of which would probably be best described as denticulates, and a small number of water worn cobbles that were used as hammerstones or grindstones. Associated with these are very large numbers of fragments of ostrich eggshell, none of which appear to have been made into beads or water containers. This is absolutely what we have come to expect from the increasing sample of MSA west coast shell middens.

The marine shells from the site are interesting and confirm patterns observed at other west coast MSA shell midden sites such as those at Sea Harvest, Hoedjiespunt, Elands Bay, Brand se Baai and Boegoeberg. In terms of species composition there are rather more mussels than limpets, although this may be variable across the different horizons visible at Yzerfontein. Among the limpets there are high frequencies of *Patella granatina*, slightly fewer *P. argenvillei* and very few *P. granularis*. This is what we have found at other MSA middens and helps to support the notion that there is no LSA contamination here, otherwise the number of *P. granularis* would undoubtedly have been higher. This same conclusion can be reached from the sizes of limpets. Although more work needs to be done, the *P. granatina* shells are very large as in other MSA sites, and much larger than any west coast LSA samples. This is a particularly interesting, though controversial observation.

Our intention is now to analyse fully these samples of disturbed material on the

assumption that there is no substantial contamination since they eroded out of the face. Goodman Gwasira will analyse the stone tool assemblage as part of his Masters dissertation on the stone tool assemblages from west coast MSA shell middens. Parkington and Gwasira will count and measure the ostrich eggshell and marine shell assemblages. Cedric Poggenpoel has already sorted some of the faunal remains which will be looked at by Richard Klein and Kathryn Cruz-Urbe in July 1999. Parkington will also be responsible for ongoing investigation of the stratigraphy and context of the archaeological levels, including dating. A number of dating methods, now employed at Hoedjiespunt, will be applied to the problem of dating ZFN 1.

HOEDJIESPUNT

9/2/10/4
(KLP 1.12.95)

We have found three occurrences of Middle Stone Age material, sometimes stratified with hyena derived bones, on the small peninsula of Hoedjiespunt, on the edge of the town of Saldanha. These had previously been known to archaeologists from the South African Museum and at least one had been systematically collected for many years by Graham Avery and Richard Klein. The peninsula is about two kilometres distant from the site of Sea Harvest, which is located in the same stratigraphic context. Since working at Hoedjiespunt we have found one more locality between Sea Harvest and the town of Saldanha, located in the Saldanha Yacht Club grounds. Here we report on work to date (April 1999) at the three Hoedjiespunt sites which we refer to as HDP1, HDP2 and HDP3.

HDP1 is a locality with both a hyena lair and a MSA shell midden stratified in part by cemented aeolian sands directly opposite the entrance to Saldanha Bay. We began to work here in 1993 intending simply to continue the practice begun by Avery and Klein of collecting bones from an eroding face. But the discovery of fragments of a hominid tooth and the recognition that there were both palaeontological and archaeological faunal assemblages at the site necessitated a clarification of the stratigraphic sequence and the provenance of hominid remains. First we cleaned off the surface smear of bone, ostrich eggshell, stone and marine shell that clothed the slope created by road construction. This has provided us with a valuable collection of material and revealed that MSA stone tools and associated marine shell and ostrich eggshell, with a small faunal assemblage, is stratified above another faunal assemblage with almost no marine shell, limited ostrich eggshell and no stone tools, evidently a lair used by a brown hyena. Because the two faunal assemblages are so different, not least in that the hominid derived MSA one is markedly marine in character whilst the hyena derived one is not, it is likely that much time separates the two occupations. This is extremely significant in that at Sea Harvest nearby hyena and hominid occupations were suspected but assumed to be approximately contemporary. This may not have been the case.

Our understanding of the stratigraphy is now fairly good and summarised in the accompanying sketch (but measured) profile. The surface shape of the Hoedjiespunt